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AUTHOR Gustafson, Robert L.; Thomsen, Steven R.
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ABSTRACT

The American Association for Higher Education is interested in how computers and online communication technologies can help contribute to the teaching and learning process. There are ways, the organization believes, for professors to incorporate online services into their courses without having to rethink their approaches to teaching. This paper raises the issue as to whether advertising and public relations curricula have kept up with the advances in this technology. The paper discusses the need for, and the merits of, incorporating the Internet and related services into the teaching of campaigns and techniques courses and offers some classroom applications. Contains 24 references. (Author/RS)

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MERGING THE TEACHING OF ADVERTISING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGNS ONTO THE INFORMATION SUPERHIGHWAY

Robert L. Gustafson, Assistant Professor--Advertising
Steven R. Thomsen, Ph.D., Assistant Professor--Public Relations
Department of Journalism
Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana 47306
317-285-8200

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Abstract

The American Association for Higher Education is interested in how computers and online communication technologies can help contribute to the teaching and learning process. There are ways, it believes, for professors to incorporate the use online services into their courses without having to rethink their approaches to teaching. The authors raise the issue as to whether advertising and public relations curricula have kept up with the advances in this technology. They argue and discuss the need for, and the merits of, incorporating the Internet and related services into the teaching of campaigns and techniques courses and offer some applications.

Introduction

A leading business magazine recently featured a cover story which proclaimed that the Internet would change the way business is conducted around the world ("The Internet," 1994). Indeed, we know that it will, because the process has begun and has started to accelerate.

When Bell Atlantic opened its World Wide Web (WWW) site on the Internet in the fall of 1994, for example, the Philadelphia-based telecommunication and information services provider joined a growing number of business users that are quickly converting what was once the exclusive domain of academics and government scientists into what they hope will become the "virtual mall" of the next century.

Bell Atlantic's WWW site was installed only months after the company had gone online with an e-mail "listserv," which it uses to distribute press releases and public relations materials to the media, government officials and interested Internet "surfers." According to Eric Rabe, who was responsible for Bell Atlantic's entrance into cyber-public relations, the e-mail distribution program has signed up more than 400 individuals--four times the number of people reached in the days when the company relied exclusively on the postal service to mail press releases to the media (E. Rabe, personal communication, September 28, 1994). Rabe, Bell Atlantic's director of corporate relations, is aware that those 400 individuals include government regulators, Clinton Administration officials, academics, consumer advocates, and even competitors. The goal of the service, he explained, was to extend the company's influence among communication policy-makers and to project the image that the company is on the cutting edge of technology.

In the fall of 1993, Bell Atlantic made its first entrance on the information superhighway with the establishment of a gopher server--a location on the Internet that allows users to browse

through documents and materials stored by an organization in a public site--and an "ftp" archive--a site that allows users to download documents from a remote computer system to their own. In one 60-day period, shortly after the gopher server was launched, more than 20,000 "connections"--individuals who logged onto the server--were made and more than 60,000 documents were examined. "We were actually stunned by that," Rabe explained (E. Rabe, personal communication, September, 28, 1994).

The "Web" site, ftp archive, and gopher site provides users with access to company histories, recent press releases, profiles of corporate officers, texts of testimonies given by Bell Atlantic executives to Congressional committees, product and service information, and the names and e-mail addresses of FCC commissioners. The "Web" server even provides a sample letter supporting Bell Atlantic's position on a FCC-related regulatory issue and allows the user to electronically send the letter with his or her name attached.

As many as 21,700 commercial domains or "storefronts"--from J.C. Penneys to Embassy Suites Hotels to Tupperware--are available on the "Web." That represents more than a 200 percent increase in the past three years ("The Internet," 1994). The Web allows users to see video, hear the voice of a sales person, and to scan through attractively designed "ads" of products that range from cars, to boxer shorts, to fine art. By clicking their mouse on a photograph, for example, they are reconnected instantly to another system that allows them to see and hear video footage related to the photo. By clicking on the name of a product, users receive additional information about the product as well as information on how to order it.

The popularity of the "Web" as a "business address" has spawned cottage industries that include "Internet entrepreneurs," marketing experts, and advertising agencies that specialize in getting customers to enter the world of "digital commerce" ("The Internet," 1994; Lewis, 1995; Wiseman, 1994). The "Web" has been described as the Internet's "business district," with the cost of setting up shop online ranging from about $14,000 to $50,000 (Bollinger, 1995).

Thousands of businesses flocked to the Internet in 1994, and giant corporations are

> investing billions of dollars in digital technology needed to link them with their customers and suppliers through all sorts of "interactive" services. All are chasing an emerging market of millions of affluent and computer-savvy customers--as many as 200 million by the end of the next decade--in a rapidly expanding global marketplace. (Lewis, 1995, p. C1)

While the online market may be in its infancy, business users are encouraged by the slow, but steady diffusion rate. Currently, about 33 percent of U.S. households have personal computers and that number is expected to reach 60 percent by 1998. Twelve percent of those household users have modems, and 6 percent subscribe to online services--one-fifth to two or more (Decker, 1994). Several company's are now racing to develop technology to allow for the encryption of credit card numbers in hopes of simplifying online transactions (Smith, 1994; Kim, 1994). One expert predicts that by the year 2000 commerce on the Internet will exceed $2 billion (Forbes, 1994).

In the world of advertising, for example, the e-mail capabilities of the Internet and online communication services have created "virtual offices," facilitating changes in the way staffers interact with their "office."

Much has been written about the remodeling of Chiat/Day's offices. Last year, Chiat/Day went "virtual" using technology to let staffers complete work without assigned work spaces, often on half-day intervals. When they're not in the office, they are connected by the Internet and e-mail. People are free to work at home or out of their car and are encouraged to spend more time at their clients' businesses. This way, according to Chiat/Day, the company's assets ar more likely to be working 24 hours a day. Good work requires thinking and access to information. Showing up for work doesn't necessarily get the job done ("Making virtual office," 1994). Laurie Coots, director of business development at Chait/Day, explained:

> It really doesn't matter where you are at 9 a.m. or 5 p.m.; what matters is that the

> client's needs are being met. Sometimes that means a team meeting; sometimes that means e-mail from the beach. ("Re-engineering," 1994)

Schell/Mullaney claims to be the world's smallest global agency and, according to *Advertising Age*, it might be right. The 30-person New York-based agency in one week produces advertising that runs in 29 countries. Thanks to the Internet, and various online services, the agency communicates with its clients via e-mail worldwide ("Re-engineering," 1994).

Richard Grove, chief executive officer of the public relations and media-consulting firm, Primetime, has created a "virtual" boardroom for a "virtual corporation." Without formal offices, Primetime employees work up their clients' publicity campaigns in their "virtual" environment of e-mail networks and faxes, usually working from their houses. "I can offer something most other public relations firms can't--freedom," explains Grove. By passing problems and information through time zones, companies can work around the clock to deliver solutions. And, according to Grove, "The one who gets there first with the information is the winner" ("For techno nomads," 1994).

"The Internet is not just a process; it's potential," wrote *Agency* magazine editor Geoffrey Precourt. "As it will clearly change the way we communicate with one another, so it will change the ways that agencies find to make a connection with their customers" ("Networking," 1995, p. 8).

It should be no surprise then that Darin Richins, product public relations manager for Utah-based WordPerfect Corporation, suggests that future advertising and public relations professionals will spend increasingly more time managing and using database and information services as well as going online to connect with clients, the media, and customers (D. Richins, personal communication, August 11, 1993) .

Purpose of this Paper

This raises the issue, however, as to whether public relations and advertising curricula have kept up with the advances in technology. Further, it raises questions as to how online technologies, and the Internet in particular, can be incorporated into classroom instruction. The purpose of this article is to suggest ways in which the Internet, e-mail, and online services can be used as an effective teaching tools in undergraduate courses. The paper draws upon the experiences of the authors, who have incorporated the use of this technology in capstone advertising and public relations courses in their department. In one sense, students may be introduced to the virtual office of the future, by being exposed to a virtual classroom experience today.

Where the Highway Begins

The Information Superhighway may be an unfortunate metaphor. A recent Freedom Forum study reports that the term is not clearly descriptive of the broad communication system and uses it tries to describe. However, this is the name commonly used to label the advanced technological connections of the telephone, television and computer, resulting in an interactive media system. On one side of the highway there are those interested in creating media and messaging. On the other side there are those interested in receiving information ("Separating fact," 1994).

At a panel discussion sponsored by the Freedom Forum Media Studies Center in February, 1994, Philip Elmer-Dewitt of *TIME* noted that the Information Superhighway means different things to different people. For example:

RBOCs

The regional Bell operating companies (RBOCs) view the highway as a way to increase sales by providing people with new ways to transmit voice, data and

graphics over their network. They are also eyeing the future transmission of video and entertainment.

Cable and Broadcast

The cable and broadcast companies are interested in distribution of their content in new forms. They are particularly interested in expanding the number of cable channels and programs and interactive technology.

Computer Industry

Computer-related companies see the highway as a connection of computer users who connect online with databases, interest groups and bulletin boards. This aspect is the most fully developed through the Internet and recent introduction of consumer on-line services such as CompuServe, Prodigy and America Online. ("For techno nomads," 1994)

About the Internet

The Internet is a global web of approximately 30,000 computer networks, 2.2 million computers and 20 million people in more than 70 countries. It connects users to thousands of databases and allows people to communicate worldwide almost instantaneously. No one really runs the Internet; it is more of a cooperative. Internet was established by the U.S. Defense Department in 1969 to connect the Pentagon with defense researchers in academia and business.

In 1986, the National Science Foundation promoted the non-defense use of the Internet by creating a special network, NSFNet. Universities started plugging into NSFNet and by the late 1980s, students at many colleges obtained Internet access. As new technology and on-line services made it easier to use, more individuals and businesses started using Internet for communication, selling, shopping and research ("The Internet," 1994).

Anyone with a personal computer and a modem can get connected to the Net for as little as $15 a month. Online services such as CompuServe, America Online and Prodigy offer limited access to the Internet. Other companies such as Delphi Internet provide direct Internet accounts.

Perhaps one part of the Internet that is now the easiest to use is the World Wide Web, which operates like the "help" screens on a Windows or Macintosh computer. The World Wide Web is useful for "cyber surfing" for information and is quickly being expanded for commercial purposes by the media and marketers.

Like Bell Atlantic, both advertising agencies and public relations firms are starting to realize the more and more consumers are collecting information from the Internet. Most have targeted the World Wide Web, an information-retrieval system that allows the use of multimedia. Rather than broadcasting messages, which are loathed in cyberspace, many marketers are setting up databases which allow consumers to browse at will. The databases combine graphics and sound plus a variety of files that can be opened for additional information.

Communication or e-mail is probably the easiest and most powerful application of the Internet that a company can employ. Because the virtual electronic post is so much faster than telephone calling and traditional postal services, people are doing things with e-mail they never could before. E-mail users can share their thoughts with dozens of others almost instantaneously around the world. It is typically no more expensive that postal mail. It saves trees. It eliminates phone tag and can be delivered at any time. It is a key contributor to the "Information Revolution."

Merging onto the Information Superhighway

The American Association for Higher Education is seriously interested in how computers and other technologies can help contribute to teaching. There are ways, it believes, for professors to incorporate the use of computers in coursework without necessarily rethinking their approaches to teaching ("Making higher education," 1994).

The authors' premise is that Advertising and Public Relations Campaigns courses offer

professors and students a variety of opportunities to combine computer-related technology and traditional coursework. Further, this range of opportunities can rather easily be tailored to fit an individual university's available resources.

The majority of four year colleges and universities and a smaller percentage of community colleges already are connected to the Internet. Access to the Information Superhighway will soon be universal. The goal of the Clinton administration is to have all the nation's schools and libraries connected by the year 2,000 (Boldt, Gustafson, & Johnson, 1994).

Some of the benefits of incorporating the use of e-mail and the Internet in marketing and economics courses have been discussed in several recent articles. These overall benefits also apply to Advertising and Public Relations Campaigns. Three strong pedagogical reasons are:

1. The use of the Net increases students' knowledge of telecommunications and computer networks.

2. The use of the Net requires writing. And, according to the Writing Across Curriculum (WAC), the more writing students do, the better their writing and analytical skills become. (Hansen, 1994)

3. The use of e-mail and the virtual classroom increases the opportunity for student-teacher involvement. Students may be less intimidated about asking questions via e-mail and instructors may reply confidentially. E-mail may also foster more student teamwork as it increases contact and collaborative opportunities. (Baker, 1994)

Unquestionably, the use of the Internet requires and improves upon a number of skills including: verbal, written, critical thinking, computer and telecommunications. Educators have an

obligation to students and employers to develop these essential skills (Hansen, 1994).

Suggestions for Steering a Campaigns Course

In the past year, both authors (one advertising professor and the other a public relations professor) have experimented with and incorporated the use of e-mail and certain aspects of the Internet in their upper-level Advertising Campaigns and Public Relations Techniques courses. The following discussion will include the various applications/assignments implemented, the benefits incurred, student reactions and additional uses of the "Net "yet to be tried.

1. Electronic Mail--Reporting

For an Advertising Campaigns class the use of e-mail communication was written into the syllabus as a course requirement and grading consideration. The class was divided into competitive "agency teams" and assigned a semester-long project to develop an integrated marketing communications campaign for a national brand.

Each student was given his or her own individual e-mail address as well as a team distribution e-mail address. The instructor listed his e-mail address on the course syllabus. Consequently, the instructor could communicate via e-mail with all team members privately or collectively. Personal and group e-mail communications were possible among each team of students. In effect, we created a virtual classroom and virtual agency teams.

Each team was required to file contact/status reports via e-mail within 48 hours after weekly meetings with the instructor (client). These reports were considered as part of "account service" and were factored into the team's final grade.

The contact e-mail reports help the students organize their work and stay on top of projects. Students learn how to write effective reports and grow more familiar with the Internet and virtual office concept. Importantly, e-mail reporting allows the instructor to monitor each team's progress more effectively and provide immediate feedback.

2. Electronic Mail--Collaboration

Beyond the benefits of more frequent status reports, tighter control, clearer expectations and immediacy, there was a noticeable increase in instructor-student involvement and group teamwork. Both individuals and teams frequently contacted the instructor via e-mail to ask questions or "bounce ideas around." The Net seems to be a less intimidating outlet for some students to ask questions or contribute ideas. If responses get lengthy or complicated, they can be stored on the computer or printed out for future use.

One complaint often heard when teaching a campaigns class is that students have trouble finding a convenient time to meet as a team. Some have conflicting class schedules, others work and so on. While e-mail cannot replace the need for team meetings, it certainly can contribute to better communication and teamwork. The instructors found that the students appreciated the opportunity to establish closer working relationships with their teammates via the Net and to have "around the clock" access. Teams often met in the evening or late night and on many occasions would compose e-mail messages for the instructor to be read first thing in the morning, "so everyone could be on the same page."

3. Computer-Assisted Research

When most people talk about the Internet, or the Information Superhighway, they usually refer only to the e-mail capabilities of the network. That is like driving across country and never stopping to check out the scenery, sample the local cuisine, or visit the local landmarks. Learning how to use the Internet to conduct research "searches" is vitally important to advertising and public relations students and employers. Campaigns students, especially, need recent information not found in textbooks. Both of the authors devised a number of exercises designed to help their students get on and off the superhighway in order to assist their research activities.

In an upper-division public relations writing and techniques course, students were given a series of "case" situations involving actual companies. Although fictitious products were used in

the assignments, students were expected to obtain actual company information. This included historical background, data on current senior-level company officers, product and service information, and company background information relating to key issues and actions.

A frequent "client," for example, has been Apple Computer. In one "case" situation, the students were told they were required develop a media kit to be distributed at a press conference to unveil a new line of computers. In order to complete the assignment, students were required to produce a corporate history and biographical sketches of key Apple executives. Students were instructed on how to access the Apple information online, which they used to collect the information needed to produce the various written assignments. Students were also able to access company information that was incorporated into the press releases which appeared in their media kits. Another recent assignment involved writing press releases announcing the appointment of senior-level executives. Students were shown how to access the Bell-Atlantic "Web" page and how to connect to the biographical sketches of key executives with that company.

In order to teach students to use the Internet for research purposes, the instructor has developed a guide, "Computer-Assisted Research: A (Very Modest) Guide to Surfing the Internet." In this guide students are instructed on how to access gopher servers, the Usenet and other newsgroups, ftp archive sites, and how to conduct an "Archie" search. Telnet and "finger" commands also are reviewed. The students also are introduced to WWW sites.

For example, students are provided step-by-step directions on how to access the gopher sites maintained by NASA and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), where they are directed to archives for press releases, media advisories, additional story ideas and contact sources, and general information. The NIST, for example, maintains a section on its server called the "NIST Science Beat," where it "pitches" story ideas and provides background for reporters who cover that governmental agency. Students are also shown how to access the "Electronic Newsstand," a gopher server that allows them to conduct, by topic and publication, online searches of more than 100 current and recent news and trade publications, such as Business Week,

Computerworld, The Economist, Inc. Magazine, the Internet Letter, Labor Trends, and the Western Journal of Medicine, to name just a few. The guide also instructs students on how to access government information available at ftp sites, such as the complete text of the original Clinton Health Care Reform Proposal.

The goal of the exercises are to familiarize students with the resources available online. They learn to search for information about their "clients," their competitors, and about issues and background information that might directly or indirectly impact their clients. Student reaction has been very positive. One measure of success is the quality of materials being produced for the written projects and assignments. Students are able to produce "professional quality" materials using real world information and scenarios. Many include the assignments from this class in their portfolios.

4. Electronic Information Services

This summer the authors' university will make available another computer-assisted research application--Lexis/Nexis from Mead Data General, Inc. For more than 15 years, Lexis-Nexis has provided computer-assisted research services to business and universities. Users simply ask the system to look for documents containing key words of their choice. The system then scans hundreds of databases for documents and can provide full-text or references only. Sources include: business and trade information, news and current events, regional information, company financials, regulatory data, government information and legal records.

Lexis/Nexis is a proverbial gold mine of information for a campaigns class and offers a "real-world" opportunity of experience in that many companies currently use it as a primary information resource. In one trial run, the authors looked at a search of 1994 business articles containing three key words: CHRYSLER and NEON and ADVERTISING. Our search found 282 articles. In future semesters, student teams will be assigned time to use Lexis-Nexis to assist their situation analyses of industries, companies and brands.

In addition to Lexis/Nexis, public relations students are also exposed to information about other online services such as Dow Jones News/Retrieval, DataTimes, Dialog, and a number of industry-manufacturing specific services, such as EEI-Online, which is operated by the Edison Electrical Institute. In the Public Relations Techniques course, for example, students are shown how these online services are used in media relations, news tracking, and issues management. In addition to the news archives maintained by these services, the students are also shown how "real-time" searches are conducted using these services. "Real-time" searching allows practitioners to track stories as they move across dozens of different news and business wires, reducing a process that once took days and weeks down to just hours and minutes.

Student Reactions

Overall, students embraced the idea of incorporating the Internet and use of e-mail in their campaigns classes. They used the system throughout the semester to file status reports, ask questions, collaborate on ideas and schedule meeting dates with their instructor and among themselves. Most reported that e-mail made communication easier and fostered better teamwork.

An informal classroom survey was conducted in one Advertising Campaigns class in order to learn more about student attitudes toward e-mail. On a 5-point scale (from #1 strongly disagree to #5 strongly agree), students were asked to respond to two statements:

1. It is important to learn how to use e-mail and Internet as many companies will expect employees to use it in the future.

2. Writing e-mail conference reports is one more way to develop good writing skills.

The mean score for the first question (n = 38) was 4.5 and 3.8 for the second, indicating that students, overall, felt that the use of e-mail and the Internet were valuable learning experiences.

Conclusions

As has been argued and discussed in the paper, the authors believe that advertising and public relations instructors must find innovative ways to incorporate the "Information Superhighway" and its services into our curricula. Students must be introduced to the services available online and shown how those services will be applied in their work-a-day worlds.

The Internet will gradually change the way business is conducted around the world. It will affect the physical corporate structure and staffing. It will affect the way companies communicate internally and externally. It will create new markets. These changes provide both new challenges and opportunities to advertising and public relations instructors. As discussed, there is a myriad of ways to meaningfully incorporate the use of the Internet in campaign and techniques courses. The results are better teamwork, an improved end-product, and a more real-world experience. In effect, as we've explained, students are introduced to the virtual office of tomorrow by being exposed to a virtual classroom environment today.

We recommend that future research seek to establish an empirical link between e-mail and Internet use and students' satisfaction, writing and research performance. We encourage the additional sharing of "case studies" explicating the creative and innovative ways in which online technologies have been incorporated into classroom instruction. Students and teachers alike will benefit from these exchanges.

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